

## STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE EDWARD J. MARKEY (D-MA)

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## INTRODUCTION OF UNIFORM POLL CLOSING ACT, H.R. 50

January 3, 2001

I am pleased to join today with Representatives Tauzin and 20 other Democratic and Republican House Members to introduce the bipartisan Uniform Poll Closing Act. The bill carries the bill number "H.R. 50" to emphasize the importance of having all 50 states close their polls at the same time in presidential elections.

Over the years, both the Democratic and Republican parties have been concerned about the fact that the news media frequently projects a particular Presidential candidate to be the victor in key battleground states before all the polls have closed nationally.

In 1980, many Democrats were outraged when Ronald Reagan was proclaimed the victor of the Presidential race on network television at 5:15 p.m. Pacific time. At that moment, polls were still open in approximately half the states, in every time zone including many in the eastern and central time zones, and all the polls in the Mountain, Pacific, Alaskan, and Hawaiian time zones. As a result of the networks' decision, many voters felt there was no longer any point in going to the polls, a development which may have affected the outcome of many state and local elections. In 1984 and 1988 many Democrats feared that network's projections in the early evening that the Republican candidate was going to be the overwhelming electoral college winner may have again affected voting in many state and local contests in the west.

This year, many Republicans were angered when the networks projected Al Gore the victor in Florida, prior to the closing of polls in the Florida Panhandle. At the same time, some GOP lawmakers raised concerns that network projections regarding the likely victors in many other key Presidential battleground states in the East or Midwest may have affected voter turnout in other states in which the polls were still open.

I believe that there is a relatively straightforward way to reduce a repeat of these concerns: adoption of a uniform poll closing time for Presidential elections. That is why today, we will introduce legislation which would establish a uniform poll closing time. Under this bill, for Presidential elections, polls in all 50 states would close at 9 p.m. eastern standard time, which is 8 p.m. central standard time and 7 p.m. mountain time. In the Pacific time zone, in Presidential election years only, in order to achieve a 7 p.m. poll closing time, daylight savings time would be extended for two weeks. This will allow the polls on the West Coast to close at 7 p.m. Pacific daylight time.

The House approved identical legislation in 1986, 1987 and 1989, but it was never enacted into law. We have an opportunity now to rectify this situation, establish a uniform poll closing time, and minimize the potential that future premature projections by the television networks regarding the winners of a Presidential election will influence voter behavior in other states.

While the public may be divided over whom they want to see become our next President, both Democratic and Republican votes agree on the need to establish a uniform poll closing time. In fact, a recent CBS poll reports that 71% of the American public would like to see a uniform national poll closing time established. This reflects the Public's recognition that standardizing poll closing times for

Presidential elections would reduce the likelihood that when the television networks declare a winner in one state, they may depress voter turnout in any remaining precincts in the state in which the polls remain open, or affect voter turnout in other states across the country.

I look forward to working with Representatives Tauzin, Dingell, and other interested Members to advance this proposal. Senator Stevens, who has long been a leader on this issue in the Senate, and who has a strong interest in working out a formulation that would accommodate Alaska and Hawaii, has agreed to introduce the same bill in the Senate. With this bill, we have been able to accomplish that goal by allowing those states to open their polls on Monday afternoon and then bring them into the framework of the nationwide uniform poll closing time we are establishing for election Tuesday at 9:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

In introducing this bill today, we are hoping to begin a debate on this issue by putting onto the table the main proposal that the House has previously approved, and we are open to considering other reasonable alternatives. What we would like to assure, however, is that this time, the Congress acts to reform the rules governing poll closing times in Presidential elections.

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